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Political Culture: People and Politics

To understand contemporary forms of government and their politics, it is imperative to be familiar with the organization and functions of political institutions. It is also important to be aware of the physical and cultural dimensions within which politics operates. These external dimensions provide the environment of politics and help to shape attitudes and values which influence political behavior. Elements of the physical, demographic, and economic environment of politics were discussed earlier; in this chapter we focus on the cultural environment.

A survey of the world's states reveals a rich pattern of diverse cultures which have evolved through history. The various cultures have been conditioned over time by factors such as geography, religion, language, ethnicity, and types of economic activity to produce wide varieties of behavior. In an engaging observation of behavioral differences, Ian Robertson noted that:

Americans eat oysters but not snails. The French eat snails but not locusts. The Zulus eat locusts but not fish. The Jews eat fish but not pork. The Hindus eat pork but not beef. The Russians eat beef but not snakes. The Chinese eat snakes but not people. The Jale of New Guinea find people delicious.⁴

Studying cultural differences is a fascinating venture. In a broad sense, culture includes intellectual development in many areas including art, architecture, cuisine, literature, music, and politics. It delineates distinctive attributes of groups and societies, masses and elites, nations and states. Political culture is one aspect of overall culture.

BOX 6.1 Reconciling cultural differences.

The European Union unites European states into a community that can benefit from free trade and large-scale planning. Reconciling cultural differences has been one of the most difficult obstacles to securing unity. Initially, problems of standardization and quality control came over such unlikely items as condoms, the content of bangers (English sausages), the ingredients in beer, and the bacterial content of cheese. Before the Swedes voted to join the European Union in 1994, they won concessions over their favorite tobacco—moist snuff. Moist snuff is prohibited in the rest of the 12-member union, but Sweden received an exemption allowing for its continued use in that country.

A well-known American professor of political science, Samuel P. Huntington, considers culture to be such a vital force that he hypothesizes in a controversial article that world politics is entering a new phase, in which the fundamental source of conflict will not be primarily ideological or economic but cultural:

Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.²

Over time, 21 major civilizations have been differentiated by history, language, culture, tradition, and religion. According to Huntington, only a few of them still exist: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African civilizations. He argues that the most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these remaining civilizations.

WHAT IS POLITICAL CULTURE?

Political culture refers to the broad pattern of values and attitudes that individuals and societies hold toward political objects.³ These objects include institutions such as the executive, legislature, bureaucracy, judiciary, political parties, pressure groups and also the individual's view of his or her self as a political actor, and in relation to others. Political culture is one of the most powerful influences that shape a political system. It creates norms—beliefs about how people should behave—and those norms influence social behavior.

Politics, therefore, always reflects the culture of a certain time and place. Political acts are embedded in the wider culture of a society and can be understood only in that context. They "reflect and exemplify society's deepest-held values."⁴ Understanding political action, therefore, requires one to understand political culture. The rationale behind politics is not always self-evident. Politics is largely conducted in terms of signals, coded language, and symbolic behavior. Words mean

different things in different cultures. The word "democracy," as we have seen, is prime example.

Cultures change extremely slowly over decades and even centuries. Since political change generally occurs *after* cultural change, it, too, is slow to change unless some major, traumatic event alters historical patterns. A country like the United States with deep, democratic roots and a tradition of peaceful changes in the political process is unlikely to suddenly adopt an authoritarian pattern of government. Similarly, an authoritarian country like China with a tradition which stresses hierarchy, order, submission to authority, and rule by a few is unlikely to change its political style quickly. Broad cultural patterns persist, and therefore political forms do too.

What individuals know and how they feel about their political system affect the number and kinds of demands they make on the state and how they respond to laws, political leadership, and decisions made within the political system. The extent to which they appreciate the political institutions of their country has other practical ramifications. When citizens accept the *legitimacy* of their state—that is, when they accept that the government has a moral right to govern—this provides a significant barrier to radical change. And if there is a strong belief in civilian authority, there is a built-in barrier to intervention by authoritarian structures or institutions such as the police and military. On the other hand, if there is little attachment to civilian institutions, allegiance to the government of the day can be expected to be low, and the possibility of intervention by police and military will be high. Political culture, therefore, demarcates the boundaries within which governments can legitimately act.

The political culture of a state, then, encompasses values and attitudes which pertain to its political system. These provide an invisible, overarching bond that unifies its citizens. That bond includes ideologies, values, traditions, customs, beliefs, myths, and symbols—all of which influence the political life of a country, and "are part of the particular pattern of orientations to political objects in which a political system is embedded."⁵

A political culture is passed on to succeeding generations through various forms of socialization, and thereby lends cohesion and continuity to politics and institutions. Socialization studies examine how attitudes and values are learned and transmitted. To a great extent they move beyond the description of beliefs and values to develop explanations for their development and acceptance.

The political culture of a country is not monolithic. It is like a tapestry made

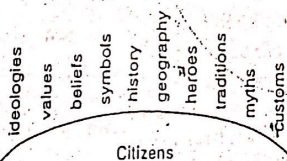


FIGURE 6.1 The overarching bond of political culture.

up of many interwoven fibers or strands. One strand is composed of the values and attitudes common to all citizens of the state. The remainder are made up of the many subcultures or divisions which exist within a country including ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional groups. In this chapter we examine the components of state-wide political cultures and consider the effect that subcultures have on them. As in a tapestry, the strands of subcultures can strengthen, but in some respects also weaken, the larger unit, depending on how they are incorporated. The political culture of a country is intimately related to how and when individuals act politically. We therefore consider the connection between political culture and political participation. We also examine the field of political socialization to consider how values and attitudes are learned and passed from one generation to another. First, however, we will trace the development of the field of political culture in political science, and consider some of the methods used to study political culture.

Historical Development and Methods

Culture has been used as an explanatory variable for as long as humans have been studying politics. However, the scientific field of "political culture" itself is relatively new, and was not established under that name until the 1950s when it was introduced in the United States. Until that time, one common form of study linking values and attitudes to behavior was the "national character" study, which was typically conducted by various forms of observation within a single country. These studies generally offered crude and impressionistic blanket descriptions such as Asians are "inscrutable," Germans are "authoritarian," Americans are "rugged individualists," Canadians are "peaceful, honest, and boring."⁶

Needless to say, such stereotypical generalizations may be based on erroneous impressions. In fact, they may tell more about the observer than the observed. In the 1890s, for example, Anglo-Saxons were certain that the Japanese were "too indolent and pleasure-loving to succeed at anything requiring hard work."⁷ They constantly underestimated Japan and were completely taken by surprise when it defeated China in 1895 and won victories over Russia in 1904 and 1905. Obviously it is important to distinguish between stereotypes and observations which recur and are based on fact.

Other early studies relating values and behavior approached the topic through the history of ideas, documenting the flow and clash of ideas across time and space. These were not known as political culture studies, but as political philosophy or political theory. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the history of such ideas.

It was partly historical circumstance that brought political culture studies to the forefront in the 1950s. With the end of World War II, French, British, Dutch, Italian, and then Portuguese colonies moved toward independent statehood, and decisions had to be made about what kind of political forms these new countries would adopt. Generally it was decided to model the new institutions after those of the respective "mother" country. As a consequence, there sprang up in Asia, Africa, and South America new countries with ambitious Western-style constitutions, political institutions, and legal systems. Most of them foundered within a very short

period and gave way to authoritarian, military, or single-party regimes. Too late, well-meaning Westerners realized that the ideas and institutions which served their own countries had evolved over generations and were inappropriate for the new states. Constitutions that appeared suitable on paper did not work in practice in many Third World states because the new states lacked societal support for the essential elements of democracy.

Nigeria is a good example. During the 1950s the British combined about 250 different Nigerian tribes, tried to teach them English as a common language, trained their leaders in parliamentary democracy, and finally, in 1960, launched Nigeria as an independent country with a democratic constitution. Six years later there was a military coup. Instability persisted and a cycle of tribal, military, democratic, and military governments has ensued. Clearly the preparation was inadequate. With a practical impetus coming from problems such as how to advise developing states like Nigeria, a new emphasis arose in the discipline. New methods of research were needed to describe and analyze political culture, so political scientists turned to research that had already been done in the field by sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists.

By the late 1950s, many political scientists had shifted their emphasis from the study of institutions to the study of attitudes—how attitudes determine government functioning. They began to examine how political culture affects support for the community, regime, and government. Unlike the impressions, stereotypes, and generalizations of national character studies, political culture studies endeavored to determine objectively "what kinds of orientations are held by which people towards which political objects" and what, if any, impact this has on political stability.⁸

A primary method employed in the study of political culture is survey research, in which data is collected in interviews with a large "sample," or selection, of individuals. The responses are aggregated, and the researcher looks for patterns or configurations that provide the political culture of the "sample." It is inferred, using statistics, that the sample characterizes the overall political culture of the region or state from which it is drawn.

Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba conducted the first such cross-national study of political culture in 1959, publishing their results in *The Civic Culture* four years later.⁹ This landmark study became a reference point for further studies: borrowing ideas and methods from other disciplines, these scholars examined public attitudes and values across five states in an attempt to measure and compare national political attitudes. The data from Britain, the United States, West Germany, Italy, and Mexico provided rich descriptions of the political cultures of the five countries.

Almond and Verba encountered many of the problems common to social science, which we discussed in Chapter 2, and exposed many strengths and weaknesses of survey research. In spite of its limitations, *The Civic Culture* offered sophisticated conclusions about the attitudes and values of various populations, the intensity with which the values and attitudes were held, and other information such as the degree of change in attitudes in a given population.¹⁰ The development of

survey technology "was the catalytic agent in the political culture conceptualization and research that took place in the 1960s and in subsequent decades.¹¹ As increasingly sophisticated sampling, interviewing, scoring, and scaling techniques were developed, it became possible to determine:

... whether and in what respects and degrees nations (states) were divided into distinctive subcultures: whether social classes, functional groups, and specific elites had distinctive orientations toward politics and public policy...

The development of statistical analysis made it increasingly possible to establish the patterns of interaction among attitudes, the relations of social-structural and demographic variables to attitude variables, and the relations of attitude variables to social and political behavior.¹²

A major contribution of cross-national surveys is that they can reveal enduring, distinctive characteristics and allow fairly precise comparison between states. Besides possible faults in design construction, perhaps the most serious drawback of cross-national survey research is the considerable financial expense it entails. To circumvent these and other problems, studies of political culture are often conducted by area specialists within particular states or regions.

Alternative methods of studying political culture include examining the opinions of the political elite rather than the mass population. The political elite consists of individuals who participate extensively in organized politics and thereby exercise considerable influence in political decision-making.¹³ Elites in democratic countries normally include distinct subgroups with control in the areas of politics, economics, and the bureaucracy. The exact composition of such elites is often controversial; however, they clearly constitute an extremely small percentage of the population even though they exercise very considerable influence in the country's decision-making process.

Some researchers study elites to discover what motivates them to participate politically. In other words, they try to identify the connection between values, attitudes, and participation. They may study groups such as government or cabinet members, senior bureaucrats or judges, where a small sample could still be considered representative of the wider universe. Or they might concentrate on political activists who work inside the system, extremist-activists who advocate a dramatic shift in the existing system, or top political leaders such as presidents or prime ministers. Some elite studies even focus on the single political actor, a strategy which allows data gathering and analysis to be intensive and precise. However, to be useful, such studies must move beyond idiosyncratic explanations to find broad explanatory factors, and on the whole that is easier to do from studies of larger groups.

Other methods used to study political culture include content analysis, by which the researcher studies the "content" of speeches, newspaper articles, other writings, and broadcasting as well as television clips in order to provide an empirical measure of specific attitudes or values. Also used are projective techniques, in which subjects are required to project their imagination to complete sentences or stories are often used to discover the orientations of people, especially children.

More traditional methods and avenues of research are also available to determine the content of the individual citizen's knowledge and awareness of the political system, as well as the generalized attitudes held about politics and political objects in society. Even the literature and films a country produces can offer insights into political values and attitudes.

THE OVERARCHING POLITICAL CULTURES OF STATES

In Chapter 3 we discussed how political leaders attempt to develop and foster a broad national identity in order to bind together the citizens of their state and promote stability. This is much more difficult in some societies than others. State boundaries are artificial and may encompass a highly differentiated territory and populace. There are, however, many components of a national culture, including a widely accepted ideology, common values, symbols, history, geography, heroes, traditions, myths, and attitudes.

Ideology is one part of the broader political culture. Chapters 8 and 9 focus extensively on this topic, but it is important here to differentiate between the two. Ideology refers to an explicit doctrinal structure that provides a particular diagnosis of the ills of society, plus an accompanying "action program" for implementing the prescribed solutions. Political culture studies are much broader; they are concerned with the views and values of citizens whether or not they embrace any explicit, formal ideology.

The purpose of ideology is to mobilize and change the orientations which form the political culture when the environment is neutral or hostile, and to maintain and justify those orientations where an ideology already dominates the environment. Typically, ideologies are the intellectual creation of an educated elite, and political leaders use their arguments to dispense simplified ideological propaganda to influence the beliefs and behavior of the mass population. Some political systems, such as in China or Iran, are based on ideologically explicit norms of communism or religion; others are less overt, such as the attachment of British Conservatives to classic laissez-faire liberalism, or French Socialists to economic modernization. Ideologies, then, are action-oriented programs that are specific to individual actors or collective actors such as organizations or elites, rather than the collective thought of a whole community such as a village or a nation.

The traditional values and ideologies which underlie a country's political culture are found in its history's unique features. The roots of political thought in the United States, for example, have been traced by Louis Hartz, who put forward the thesis that North America, like other societies founded by European settlement, is a "fragment society." Hartz said that the New World societies based their political cultures on single European ideologies brought as "cultural baggage" during colonization. Immigrants to the new land did not represent all elements of the society that they left, but they set up institutions and myths which perpetuated their beliefs and values.

In the case of the United States this included liberal values such as suspicion

of political power and its uses, the need for government to be controlled by the people, and strong respect for the rights of the individual. In pre-revolutionary United States, the liberalism of British philosopher John Locke was the prevailing ideology. Locke's ideas were based on the importance of the individual, free enterprise, and the right of the individual to pursue personal interests without government interference. Loyalists who left the United States for Canada at the time of the American Revolution took these liberal values with them—along with strong anti-American, pro-British sentiments. These ideas impacted strongly on the political culture of English-speaking Canadians. The cultural differences that developed between English Canada and the United States were, therefore, relatively minor. In both cases, the liberal ideology "congealed" before socialism developed in Europe; therefore socialism did not take hold in North America.¹⁵

A country's political values form the broad base of its political system. Though generally taken for granted and not articulated, they set the parameters of acceptable behavior and underlie the attitudes of citizens toward specific political objects, providing guidelines to define what is right or wrong, what is or is not valuable or acceptable. As we see below, states vary in the degree to which there is unity with respect to fundamental political values.

Throughout Western Europe and North America the basic values of democracy, human rights, and political freedoms are part of the political culture and often are enshrined in state constitutions. The political values of individual states are symbolized in flags, anthems, historical heroes, and monuments which reinforce respect for, and emotional attachment to, political institutions. The symbols provide a focal point for national unity. Myths grow around them and are believed because they make people feel good—usually by confirming prejudices or reinforcing convictions of moral superiority.

Political leaders often use such symbols to unite and even manipulate their fellow citizens. A relevant example can be found in Japan where the traditional role of Emperor has had very special symbolism. The Meiji Constitution and culture of modern Japan are still based on a theory of the state known as *kokutai*. For theoretical and legal purposes, the Emperor and the state are fused—the Emperor embodies the state. Formerly, spiritual authority was also embodied in the Emperor, who was considered to be a "living god," the linear descendant of the Sun-Goddess.

When, under US tutelage, the Japanese established a new constitution and democratic government in 1946 after the war, the Emperor remained the traditional symbol for the state and for the unity of the Japanese people, even though he had formally lost his status as a god. In November 1990, Emperor Hirohito's son Emperor Akihito was invested in a ceremony grounded in animistic Shinto religion. The event drew considerable criticism from liberal academics, Buddhists, and Christians in Japan, exemplified by a Japanese historian who claimed that the ceremony clearly intended to deify the Emperor.¹⁶ He claimed that the ceremony violated the constitutional separation of state and religion in modern Japan. Modern Japanese culture is rejecting the old symbolism partly because it was in the name of the Emperor (and therefore by divine order) that Japan invaded other countries during World War II. This Japanese myth which posits a link with the

gods through the Emperor engendered belief in Japanese racial superiority, a belief which, in the past, justified genocide in China, forced labor and prostitution in Korea and Taiwan, and brutal Japanese administrations in East and Southeast Asia. Few believe in this myth today.

History, geography, shared symbols, heroes, traditions and other facets of historical memory, along with ideology, provide the basis of relatively durable beliefs and values that set the general parameters of political behavior. Also important to political culture are the specific attitudes or orientations of citizens toward political objects such as politicians. These attitudes may be less widely accepted than basic beliefs and values, and more fleeting, but they may be more immediate determinants of political behavior depending upon the intensity with which they are held.

Orientations or attitudes toward political objects may be categorized in three basic types: cognitive, affective, and evaluative. Cognitive orientations are based on knowledge about political objects. They include information that an individual believes to be factual, whether the facts are correct or not. For example, a person might have knowledge about historical events, the details of certain policies or features of the constitution, or how bills become law. There could be errors in this knowledge, but these facts are still the basis of the individual's cognitive orientations. Affective orientations are based on feelings or emotions about political phenomena. They may be evoked in a person by such objects as the national flag or national anthem or phenomena such as having the opportunity to vote in an election or referendum. Evaluative orientations are based on judgments or assessments about these facts and feelings. An individual's judgment about political issues is based on the many cognitive and affective orientations that make up the evaluation. A core of "fundamental beliefs" underlies evaluative orientations. A person's cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations serve as guides to establish opinions on particular subjects when new political information is encountered.

At the national level political culture serves many purposes. As the set of values within which the state operates, it draws individuals together; provides rationale for judgment and action; constitutes the character and personality of a community; and helps determine the form of government which will exist in a country and how stable that government will be. In some states ideological diversity and free expression of ideas is a basic feature of the political culture; in others one ideology is a dominant force directing and limiting political thought, behavior and institutions. This is the case in communist states such as China and Cuba and also in religious theocracies like Iran. Confucianism is another fascinating example of a culture that for centuries has greatly influenced political behavior in large parts of Asia. We shall examine these and other specific political cultures in more detail in the next chapter.

Political Subcultures

The strength of the state-wide political culture is greatly affected by elements in the environment which may work against it. Factors such as geography, language, ethnicity, religion, and economic resources, which help shape the political culture of

a country, can also be the basis of conflicting attitudes and values. They may help create subcultures, or cultures which exist within the overarching national culture of the state.

Large and complex states are rarely monolithic; rather they are almost always pluralistic. Within the framework of the larger political culture, there may exist a variety of subcultures in which significant numbers of people hold distinctive values and attitudes toward political objects. When different cultural groups, which are aware of their distinctiveness and are impervious to change, coexist within a national state, the phenomena is known as cultural or social pluralism.¹⁷ One author has described plural societies as "a medley of stateless societies: an assemblage of contiguous, closed communities in which membership is ascriptive and mandatory."¹⁸

Those countries which lack broad agreement on how political life should be conducted and base it instead on factors such as ethnicity, class, region, or religion, are often said to have fragmented political cultures. Countries such as Nigeria or the former Yugoslavia are extreme examples of fragmented political cultures. Patriotism and national identity are weak to the point that the unity of the country is threatened—its political structure and even its very existence may become unstable. States with a strong consensus about a core of political beliefs are said to have integrated political cultures. They are characterized by strong national identity, patriotism, high level of social trust, acceptance of social, economic, and political arrangements. They are relatively stable politically. Despite many other problems of class, race, and gender, the United States is a good example of an integrated political culture.

There is a wide spectrum of countries with gradations of pluralism.¹⁹ Some states consist of vertically divided communities that are conscious of their distinctive identities. Others form a "melting pot" so that although individuals may speak different languages, belong to different races, and so on, they are fairly well integrated into the mainstream of the country's population; they have accepted a common set of fundamental values and basic beliefs that provide an overarching bond

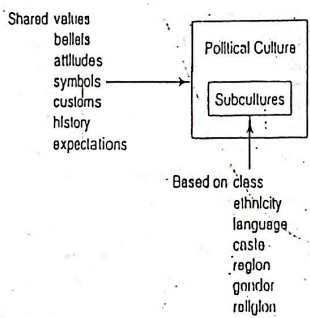


FIGURE 6.2 Political culture and political subcultures.

for society. The United States is a good example of a "melting pot" society which is highly integrated even though it is socially complex and composed of different races and immigrants from many lands. (See Table 6.1.) Americans enjoy a strong sense of national identity and unity of political outlook. In countries like Nigeria and India, at the other extreme, subcultures do not overlap as they do in the United States. There, the social segments are separate and impervious and they are more likely to challenge the political structure of the country.

Within every state, horizontal divisions of class form the basis of socioeconomic subcultures, and vertical divisions exist along such cultural lines as ethnicity, language, caste, region, gender, and religion. A great many states are divided along some of several of these lines into antagonistic sections often referred to as "political cleavages." A political cleavage is a set of attitudes that divides the state's citizens into major political groups.²⁰ Sometimes such cleavages are strictly political in that they represent groups that have attitudes which are developed, sustained, and organized by political leaders; sometimes they are not.

Often, political cleavages are based on ethnicity. When individuals and minorities share cultures distinct from those of other groups, social scientists label them "ethnic groups" or "ethnic minorities." Ethnicity is a largely subjective characteristic which defines groups of people who share customs, language, dialect, and/or cultural heritage, and sometimes distinct physical or racial characteristics. Like national identity, ethnicity is primarily a subjective phenomenon. Ethnicity is often reinforced by different customs, language, dialect, and cultural heritage, and sometimes distinct racial or physical characteristics. In many societies, such as the United States, ethnic groups live together as one nation. In others, however, such as Canada or Belgium, some ethnic groups define themselves as separate nations.

Ethnic characteristics are often, but not always, bonded to a specific religion. French ancestry and Roman Catholicism go hand in hand; Arabs are predominantly Muslim (although there are significant Christian populations in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and elsewhere); Jews are followers of Judaism. When such ethnic/religious groups exist inside a country where the dominant religion is not their own, they tend to segregate themselves and hold values distinctive from the dominant social

TABLE 6.1 Ethnic Composition of the United States, 1995

	1980	1990	1995
White	76.7	71.3	73.6
Black	11.7	12.1	12.0
Hispanic	6.4	9.0	10.2
Asian	1.5	2.9	3.5
Other	3.6	4.7	0.7

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1995*, 115th ed. (Lanham, Md.: Bernan Press, 1995), p. 19. Figures for 1980 and 1990 are based on census data from those years; 1995 is based on a projection (total projected population, 1995—263,434,000).

system. If such differences become politicized, the results can be detrimental to national unity. As well, if radical members of a religious sect break away, there is a danger that it may give rise to a religious fanaticism unacceptable to the dominant society. Religious values may be uncompromising, and when such religious issues enter into the public agenda, there is a danger of activities which undermine democracy. History is replete with examples of religious wars, inquisitions, crusades, and massacres. Today, examples are still in evidence in many areas such as between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland; Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims in India; and, of course, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims in the war-torn remains of the former Yugoslavia.

Language is another feature distinguishing groups in culturally plural societies. Fewer than one state in five has only one shared language. In the remainder, an array of languages is spoken. Language divisions are frequently part of political cleavages and are particularly divisive when they correspond with strong ethnic identities.

Class is another source of distinctive political attitudes and beliefs. The divisions between classes are rarely well defined, but indicators such as level of income, education, and occupation tend to produce class identities. Class is discussed further in Chapter 8 as the basis of Marxist thought. It can be a powerful force, particularly when linked to group identities such as trade unions or political parties. Labor parties which seek to improve the lot of blue-collar workers exist in many countries.

Yet another common political cleavage is based on region. Different regions of a country often have unique patterns of settlement, geographic, and economic factors that are politically significant. They produce regional economies and can be particularly divisive when they correspond to linguistic or ethnic divisions, as, for example, with the French-speaking Canadians in the province of Quebec.

Other human characteristics that can become politicized identities are gender and age. Subcultures endure with varying degrees of intensity. They may exhibit distinctive political behavior and also often support distinctive political parties, interest groups, and public policy. Sometimes plural societies are dominated by one or two groups; sometimes groups coexist relatively equally.

Certain political theorists, Karl Marx being the most prominent, have argued that horizontal economic cleavages, manifested in class, are at the heart of political cleavages. Others, such as G. Bingham Powell, Jr., argue that cultural pluralism is a far more serious factor in social divisions because it is relatively harder to find reasonable compromises on cultural conflicts than to find them on economic issues.²¹ When different religious principles clash, for example, it is extremely difficult to find compromises. This problem is seen in the contemporary abortion debate, which some have called a "cultural civil war."

If subcultures become too strong vis-à-vis the national political culture, the fabric of the society is weakened and the state may break apart. In a subculture community within a plural society the individual reserves loyalty more for his or her own group than for the state as a whole. This divided loyalty is the basis of links between vertical segmentation and instability, intensity of conflict, and violence.²²

Subcultural characteristics create an identity or sense of selfhood that may be threatened by grievances against the state or other groups, causing fear and hostility.²³ Studies have shown that rioting or political violence is not much more common, on a per capita basis, in ethnically divided nations than in homogeneous nations. However, when political violence does occur, it is more serious and causes more deaths—for example in Sri Lanka since the 1980s.²⁴ There is also a tendency for cultural pluralism to diminish class conflicts. That is, perceptions of class division tend to be inhibited by the strong cultural segmentation of a society.

Sometimes a dictator or totalitarian government attempts to hold a culturally plural state together by force. A dictator or dominant party may impose a common ideology but even use of such harsh measures to enforce unity may not be successful. Such methods may foster a deep cleavage between public and private lives, so that individuals obey the dictates of the state only superficially. In the pre-1989 Soviet Union ethnic and regional subcultures thrived behind the facade of unity, and as soon as the ties of communism were loosened, many ethnic groups and regions that had been tightly controlled began to demand autonomy and political independence.

Some countries such as the Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland have survived by consociational or consensus democracy despite strong cultural cleavages. In such democracies, ruling elites are not divided to nearly the same extent as society as a whole and they can cooperate to govern regardless of societal differences. Arend Lijphart, who introduced these terms to the discipline, said that the essential characteristic of consociational democracy is the "overarching cooperation at the elite level with the deliberate aim of concentrating disintegrative tendencies in the system."²⁵ The impact of consociationalism is discussed further in Chapter 12.

Leaders of newly emerging states have to be particularly wary of cultural pluralism because of the possibility of instability, conflict, and violence. To promote cohesiveness, they often try to enforce a common language and exercise strong control through the educational system and media. And of course, like other coun-

BOX 6.2 Integrating ethnic minorities: Indonesia.

Since Indonesia took control of Irian Jaya (the former West New Guinea) from the Netherlands in 1963, it has been attempting to socialize the natives. In one of its first attempts, in the 1970s, the army launched "Operation Penis Gourd," airlifting jogging shorts and dresses to encourage wearing clothes. The operation failed. Shortly thereafter, an American missionary observed men wearing the shorts on their heads and the women using the dresses as shoulder bags. However, by 1995 only about 5 percent of the residents in remote highland areas still prefer to walk around semi-naked. They speak in a mixture of Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, and their own dialect. They are taught the national education curriculum, including the *pancasila* ideology which stresses national unity. They "are taught that loyalty is due not just to their god, or to their clan, but to a culturally diverse nation of millions of people."²⁶

tries, they try to establish and celebrate common national symbols such as flags, anthems, and national holidays. Sometimes they adopt political rhetoric such as "imperialists" and "bourgeois capitalists" or "reds" to identify a common, exterior enemy in order to promote unity.

Economic, social, and political development do not necessarily eliminate the negative effects of political pluralism. Often economic disparities and rivalries between groups increase; for example, greater differences may arise between urban political centers and the periphery, creating a privileged elite at the center and an isolated, insecure population at the periphery. This may reinforce other cultural segments present and deepen vertical cleavages. While subcultures are potentially disruptive to a country, it must be noted that there are also forces from without that can put stress on a country's political culture. A relatively small country in terms of population, economic power, and military strength is particularly vulnerable to pressures from larger countries which are proximate to it. Canada and Mexico, for example, must continually struggle to maintain economic, political, and cultural identities separate from that of the United States.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL CULTURE

Political culture is intimately linked to political participation. The term political participation applies to all political actions of individuals. In ancient Athens, direct participation in the political affairs of the city was deemed to be the essence of democracy. However even though informed participation is desirable, it is not a necessary condition of democracy. Today, with states forming ever larger units encompassing millions of people, democracy and direct public participation in decision-making are not inextricably bound.

Nonparticipation is not necessarily an indication of alienation or dissatisfaction, nor is it necessarily a bad thing. It could indicate hostility or indifference, but it might also mean satisfaction and consent with the way elected, responsible politicians are carrying out their tasks. What is important is that democracies provide opportunities for participation, so that when individuals or groups feel strongly about an issue—such as nuclear energy, pollution, abortion laws, and the like—they are free to generate political activity, mobilize people, and actively promote their interests.

A government can take many measures to encourage participation by its citizens. It can structure electoral systems in order to make voting easier, or even make it compulsory as in Australia. Or, it can make voting relatively more difficult through registration laws, as in the United States. A government can put in place laws encouraging individuals to join political groups. It can help ensure citizens have the educational skills required to participate. And it can develop efficacious citizens who believe they can engage in political activities effectively. The Almond and Verba *Civic Culture* study showed that participative political values tend to be more widespread in industrial democracies compared to nondemocratic and less developed countries.

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Political culture is the product of the history of a society; collective orientations are reinforced and passed from generation to generation through families, educational systems, the work place, the media, and various other institutions, including the political system itself. The process by which political culture is transmitted and maintained, transformed, or created, at both the individual and community levels, is called political socialization. It comprises casual, informal learning from peers and family, who are often considered to be primary agents of political socialization. It also includes both informal and overt political indoctrination by secondary sources including educational institutions, the media, or other institutions. It is therefore a lifelong process. The content and manner of political socialization is subject to debate because what may be considered proper civic training by one population or individual may be viewed by another as indoctrination and brainwashing.

Talcott Parsons and David Easton were among the pioneers of political socialization theory.²⁷ They reasoned that the process of political socialization, which builds citizen support for the state through norms and beliefs, is a major ingredient of political stability. To varying degrees, governments deliberately attempt to inculcate values that will enhance popular support for the country's political institutions. In Western democracies this tends to be relatively subtle. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, authoritarian regimes regularly control and use schools, mass media, and other means at their disposal, including sports and art, to socialize their citizens. In the 1960s, for example, Chinese popular theater and opera included patriotic songs which generally called for crushing Western imperialism.

Institutions that shape individual and collective attitudes and values are known as agents of political socialization. These agents must be identified in order to explain the processes through which they affect the political orientations of individuals. Analysts must show that the information has been internalized by indi-

BOX 6.3 Developing symbols in Russia.

The new, democratically oriented Russia that emerged after 1991 needed new national symbols. Choosing a new flag was easy—it became a red, white, and blue tricolor, which had once been the official banner of the Russian Imperial Navy. However, the stirring national anthem was harder to replace. Political correctness (an unusual malady in Russia) required deference to all of Russia's different nationalities and religions. Said the chairman of the national composers union, "We can't have lyrics about Christ or about Slavs and we don't want this false patriotism or the stupid rhetoric that was in the Soviet hymn."

When the first competition for new words and tune failed in 1995, the committee suggested a new sweepstake to come up with something suitable. "A country needs a good anthem to boost patriotism and just to make people feel better about themselves and their lives."²⁸

viduals in such a way that it affects political beliefs, and is converted into political action. However, there is not yet much conclusive research which causally links the activities of specific agents of socialization to the political actions of individuals. In part, this is because socialization occurs over a long period of time, and information transmitted by different agents is often inconsistent. We shall briefly examine some of the most important agents including the family, educational and religious institutions, and the mass media. There are, of course, others including: peer groups, friends, work places, and even governments.

Societies vary a great deal in the extent to which they actively socialize their citizens politically. At one extreme, where central institutions are not strong or do not choose to exercise control, socialization is left to spontaneous action by families and other primary and secondary agents. At the other extreme, political socialization is devised and conducted with absolute control by an authoritarian state, and all agents of socialization are harmonized. But no socialization, even the most assiduous, is perfect; it suffers many discontinuities. People are not entirely passive, and social groups are not always malleable. And, the values of the different sub-cultures to which an individual belongs may conflict. Political culture and degrees of participation are therefore constantly evolving even when change is not the explicit goal of political leaders.

All governments, democratic and authoritarian, old and new, try in varying ways to create and maintain national symbols and myths to unify the people of the state and provide a strong national identity that will promote emotional allegiance. Symbols can be a divisive force if they are not carefully designed to encompass major groups. In Britain, for example, the present Union Jack dates from the union with Ireland in 1800. The flag joins the cross of St. Andrew (for Scotland) and the Cross of St. Patrick (for Ireland) so that each color is uppermost in two quarters. Imperialism carried and planted the Union Jack around the world, but the flag was never officially adopted by Parliament. Today it is said that only the English wave the flag with enthusiasm. Ireland is no longer part of the Union, Wales is left out, and the Scottish Nationalists prefer their own version. The Flag

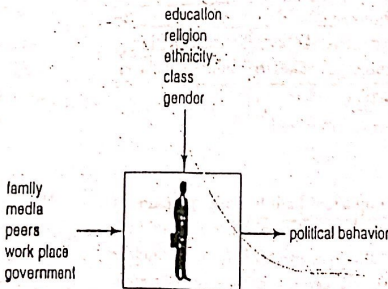


FIGURE 6.3 Individual political socialization.

Institute is trying to get a standard version adopted by Parliament by 2001, the flag's two-hundredth birthday. It may not be easy.

The Family

The family is an important socializing agent in the early years of an individual's life. It can even be influential in instilling political loyalty as manifested in adult party preferences and voting behavior. For example, in Britain, for some years after 1945, the best predictor of a person's vote was how his or her parents voted.²⁹ Family influence is not absolute, however. Parents have to possess firm convictions in order to transmit them in the first place (and many do not), and they must also communicate them to their children (which again, many do not).³⁰

Political preferences which are learned early tend to persist. They may be held more or less strongly by individuals depending on the consistencies or discontinuities in their political socialization. If, for example, a long time elapses between socialization and the assumption of a political role, then attitudes may be weakly held. As well, exposure to a great number of agents or political situations which transmit contradictory messages may cause change and discontinuities in attitudes.

Differences of opinion exist concerning when political learning takes place. Some psychologists, for example, emphasize the importance of the family with regard to what is learned at a young age. Assumptions and orientations learned during this period can "become inarticulate major premises which then exercise a background effect on thought and overt behaviour precisely because they are not made sufficiently conscious to become open to challenge."³¹ That is, children learn attitudes in nonpolitical contexts which are later carried over to political life. Other psychologists believe that socialization experiences which are closer in time to the relevant political context have the greatest impact. They therefore assign relatively more importance to socialization which takes place in adolescence or adulthood, stressing the importance of issues, personalities, and events. As Dennis Kavanagh concludes: "The durability of the early impressions depends to some extent upon their usefulness in the new circumstances—particularly the political and social conditions—to which a person is exposed."³²

The influence of the family is disputed by Marxists, who interpret the world in terms of class struggle. They regard the family as relatively insignificant as a socializing agent compared to adult experiences. They believe that socialization is largely a systematic and pervasive effort by middle-class elites to produce social consensus by using social agencies such as the media.

Educational Institutions

A country's education system represents an important path to political power. In developed societies political leaders tend to be the product of a few elite universities, and individuals who attain such an education are primarily from the middle class. Screening biases typically leave the working classes politically underrepresented even in countries where schools are free and open to all.

Schools are an important source of attitude formation for the masses as well as the elite. In democratic societies educational curriculum is most likely to socialize politically through civic training designed to produce informed, participatory citizens. In authoritarian countries it is likely to emphasize indoctrination or more overt teaching of the "correct" political answers based on a specific political ideology. Informally, schools provide regular social contact with peer groups and teachers who exercise pressures (sometimes conflicting) on individuals to conform, accept authority figures, and behave in a certain way. They reinforce views and attitudes already absorbed, including those having to do with the political sphere. Sometimes they provide conflicting orientations that cause individuals to defer political commitment. Classrooms themselves can be organized in a rigid, authoritarian manner or in a more relaxed, democratic fashion.

Apart from this latent socialization, schools also attempt to instill specific attitudes among students. Course material and texts present themes and points of view with the aim of having students internalize certain knowledge and beliefs. Textbooks and lessons must be selective and thus contain biases regarding what is emphasized. University students are not free from educational socialization either. At the university level, ideas and course material is far from value-free. When the Berlin Wall fell and Germany was reunited in 1989, universities in the former East-ern sector were in a state of turmoil. Professors who taught Marxist-Leninist courses in East German institutes became redundant, and much of the rest of the educational system was systematically expunged of communist influences. In many university departments, professors had been trained only in Marxist-Leninism or the now-irrelevant legal structures and economic principles of a communist state. Some students were caught in the middle of their university careers: The law, political science, or history they had learned was no longer relevant, and they were told to forget much of what they knew and begin again using new, imported Western books and ideas. Even university names were changed: The Karl Marx University became, once again, the University of Leipzig.

Political authorities can, and do, influence the content of educational materials in order to buttress their views. Sometimes the influence is openly political and sometimes it is not, but virtually all states try to ensure that material is presented which is supportive of its politics and dominant cultural norms.

The European School in Brussels is an example of an attempt to reach beyond the socialization of a single state. Here, students from the 15 states of the European Union come to be educated not as products of a motherland or fatherland but as Europeans. This is also true on the various campuses of the United Nations University.

Religious Institutions

As with educational institutions, religious institutions exercise a significant informal influence on a state's political culture. Some, such as fundamentalist Islam, are very rigid and authoritarian in their structure, organization, and teaching. Others, for example, the Unitarian Church, are very flexible and democratic. Some

churches or religious groups actively promote political attitudes or ideologies, while such teachings are quite peripheral to others. In theocratic states such as Iran and the Vatican City, politics and religion are inseparable. We will consider religion and political culture in detail in the next chapter.

The Mass Media

The growth of communications technology in recent decades has dramatically increased the impact of the mass media on the political culture of states. By media we mean communication media—agents of communication such as radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. Television and newspapers in particular shape public opinion and its expression. Communications guru Marshall McLuhan noted decades ago that "the medium is the message," by which he meant that we must look beyond the content of the media to understand the effects of the medium itself on our lives and our thinking. Mass media are crucial sources of political information in most modern societies, suggesting the topics citizens think about, and often also what to think about the topics. They have enormous access to the public. By the time American children finish high school, for example, they have watched on average almost twice as many hours of television as they have spent in classrooms.³³ Television reaches adults as well as children, and offers a useful means of socialization that is crucial to political modernization in developing countries.

Media are not neutral. Like textbooks and school lessons, they are selective in subject and content. They are used to inform and persuade. They are extensive but not comprehensive. There is little depth of coverage and stories appear and disappear as if by magic. They may be biased. Journalists in Western democracies today are commonly criticized for their tendency to see world events through "liberal" eyes, to report on events as a game that is largely about winning and losing. Reporting, it is said, is based on cynicism rather than skepticism, so that public figures and political events are discussed in negative terms. This magnifies the bad and ignores or underplays the good, casting doubt and even distorting events to suggest scandal where there is none. Journalists have learned that they get more personal rewards for outrageous opinions, so they tend to oversimplify and sensationalize.

All political news is delivered to the public through media intermediaries—journalists and media owners—and they have their own biases and agendas. Sometimes major media outlets are owned by only a few members of the wealthy, dominant class; sometimes they are controlled by the government. It can be expected that biases of the owners will be reflected in the presentations. And the more chain-owned newspapers there are instead of independents, for example, the more newspapers will appear to be stamped from a giant corporate cookie cutter, taking the same point of view.

In democratic countries the media are relatively free and independent. However one study has estimated that governments in more than 85% of the states of the world substantially censor their media.³⁴ In authoritarian countries, such as

BOX 6.4 Print media in authoritarian political systems.

In absolute monarchies, restrictions on the print media may be very severe. In Saudi Arabia, for example, all foreign magazines for sale are previously read by the country's religious censors, known as the *mutawa*. This is an independent religious body sanctioned by the government. It even combs magazines such as *People* and *Better Homes and Gardens* to paint out exposed arms and legs with black markers. Sometimes they draw black robes over pictures of women. All baggage entering the country is searched at entry and any books and magazines suspected of containing explicit or subversive material (such as *Time* or *Newsweek*) are seized. In Iran, in 1994, the parliament banned satellite dishes and placed an austere revolutionary at the head of Iranian television to turn the medium into an "open university" for Islamic thought.³⁶

In China, state-owned networks generally mean outright control of the news, making it almost a commercial for the communist leadership. In these countries journalists have far less legal protection when they engage in free speech. In Cuba, for example, unofficial print and broadcast outlets are banned. Independent journalists trying to send stories to foreign media are treated as political dissidents and often put in jail.

Political bias of news media is overt in authoritarian regimes and easily spotted. By political bias we mean deliberate manipulation of the content and presentation of news so as to favor certain political interests over others. In Western liberal democracies this is more subtle. Sometimes it is through omission—as when American broadcasters only briefly mentioned civilian deaths in Iraq during the Gulf War, but at the same time stressed the small numbers of American casualties. Sometimes it is through unquestioning acceptance of the system in place—for example, basic capitalism or socialist principles.

As intermediaries between governments and the population of a country, media play a significant role in legitimizing government, making it more effective, and preventing abuse of power. The journalists take seriously their role of exposing wrongdoing, pursuing leads with sometimes fanatical fervor. In the United States, they have been major partners in exposés including Watergate and Whitewater, for example. Television anchors in particular gain such exposure that they become well-known personalities with an impact on public opinion. In 1968, Walter Cronkite denounced the American role in Vietnam. This was during the Tet Offensive, and the attack on government policy caused then President Johnson to halt the attack. Most historians today believe that the Tet offensive was in fact a very successful operation that represented a military setback for the Vietcong Vietnamese.

Political leaders and parties learn how to use and manipulate the media to maximum advantage. Media exposure is vital, and experts are hired to assure that the message conveyed is the right one. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher enjoyed a significant boost in popularity following extensive media coverage of her handling of the Falklands invasion by Argentina in 1982. In 1983, mas-

sive media coverage is credited with boosting the popularity of US President Ronald Reagan following his order to invade Grenada.

Political leaders have learned standard "tricks" to get the media coverage they seek. Announcements are carefully timed for optimum exposure and generally delivered in a carefully prepared setting with a platoon of cameras. Leaders are taught by specialists how to improve their image on television. Other specialists concentrate on producing just the right "sound clips" for television news. A well-known example of a clever sound clip was former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's famous soundbite "The lady's not for turning."³⁷ "Spin doctors," too, routinely ensure that their "interpretation" of events is disseminated to foster the "appropriate" attitudes and opinions in the public.

Mass media play a less significant socializing role in developing countries, particularly in rural areas where there are fewer televisions. However, even there leaders recognize the potential impact of the media and use it extensively. Authoritarian countries which maintain complete state control over all media outlets use the media to legitimize government behavior and make great efforts to ensure its accessibility to all. In Cuba, for example, the government supplies televisions to most recipients of public housing, thus enabling Fidel Castro a vehicle to enter as many homes as possible. Media control is considered to be so important by military leaders that in planning a *coup*, one of the first things revolutionary leaders do is take over the means of communication so that all messages to the public can be censored and tightly controlled.

Media socialization does not stop at artificial borders. Economically powerful countries exercise an enormous socializing impact on others. Through CNN, newspapers such as *The New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*, and the Hollywood film industry, the United States disseminates American culture abroad. This role is taken seriously by the US media. When the American marines landed in the beaches of Somalia in late 1992, camera crews were there waiting for them. In Canada, where the population is thinly spread within 100 miles of the long Canada/US border, the country is deluged with US radio and television signals. Almost all foreign reporting is brought from US media so that by the time it reaches the public it has been filtered through American eyes and given American viewpoints. Symbols of American cultural penetration are even in more remote locations. Isolated places in the Pacific like the Cook Islands often have no television reception, but they do have large stocks of US videos for their VCRs. Of particular interest at the turn of the century is the electronic media, which appears to be practically limitless in its capacity to carry information around the world.

The scientific literature about political culture, then, has been concerned primarily with the role of values in maintaining stability in democratic regimes. It is clear that norms and beliefs are central to an explanation of stability and change, but so far a complete explanation is elusive. In spite of the work done, it remains difficult to provide unambiguous, empirical evidence that a specific agent of socialization or feature of the environment or demographic factor is the direct cause of political behavior and government performance. Political culture, as an ex-

planatory variable, sets limits to the range of outcomes. It does not determine specific outcomes. Many early studies of the subject treated political culture as an independent variable in predicting the success of modernization, democracy, and capitalism. However, there is no absolute proof that a particular culture must prevail over time. Past political culture is not destiny—it can change. Today, throughout Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Latin America, Asia, and Africa, for example, fragile new democratic political cultures are emerging in which citizens have entirely new expectations and beliefs concerning their government and their own role in society.

NOTES

1. Ian Robertson, *Socialism* (New York: Worth Publishers, 1981), p. 63.
2. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993), pp. 22-49; Several responses to this controversial article appeared in the September-October 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, and Huntington responded to the critics in "If Not Civilizations, What?" in the November-December 1993 issue, pp. 186-94. Others criticize Huntington's effort to group Islamic states. Fred Halliday, for one, maintains that Huntington has simply reinforced the stereotype that there is one binding Islamic answer to all political questions. See his *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).
3. Political culture has been defined a great many ways. Our definition is influenced by Sidney Verba, "Comparative Political Culture," in Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 513; and Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966), p. 50.
4. Oliver H. Woshinsky, *Culture and Politics: An Introduction to Mass and Elite Behaviour* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995), p. 41.
- ✓ 5. Dennis Kavanagh, *Political Science and Political Behaviour* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1988), p. 50. For further discussion of the concept of political culture, see Stephen Chilton, "Defining Political Culture," *Western Political Quarterly*, 41, no. 3 (September 1988).
6. Examples are found in essays in *National Character in the Perspective of the Social Sciences*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March 1967.
7. James Fallows, "Is Japan the Enemy?" *The New York Review of Books*, xxxviii, no. 10 (May 30, 1991), 34, in a review of Endymion Wilkinson, *Japan Versus the West: Image and Reality* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. A3.
8. Kavanagh, *Political Science and Political Behaviour*, p. 50.
9. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963).
10. See the essays by Almond, Lijphart, and Verba in Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, eds., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980). Note particularly Gabriel A. Almond, "The Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept," p. 1.
11. Almond, "The Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept," p. 15.
12. *Ibid.*
13. See Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, "Political Participation," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsky, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol. 4 (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), pp. 24-25.
14. Louis Hartz, ed., *The Founding of New Societies* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1964).
15. See Robert J. Jackson and Doreen Jackson, *Politics in Canada* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1994), pp. 74-76.